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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: FARDC LEADS MILITARY OPERATION IN SOUTH KIVU

1. (SBU) For the first time, the Congolese military (FARDC) has played the lead role in planning a joint MONUC-FARDC mission against the FDLR in South Kivu. The FARDC Third Integrated Brigade and the FARDC First Reserve Brigade supplied the majority of the troops -- more than 1,000 to MONUC's 300 -- for Operation South Sentinel, which began February 26 in the Kahuzi Biega National Park sixty kilometers north of Bukavu. MONUC also contributed logistical support and combat helicopters to the operation. As of March 1, according to MONUC Poloff in Bukavu, nineteen FARDC soldiers have been wounded and two killed. No FDLR casualty numbers are available.

2. (SBU) This FARDC-MONUC operation aims to provide security for the local population, push the FDLR from the area, and re-establish government authority. In a series of MONUC-led operations in South Kivu since July 2005, FARDC and MONUC have moved against the FDLR in the territories of Walungu and Kabare, South Kivu and destroyed 30 FDLR camps.

3. (SBU) A MONUC DDRRR team began conducting an intensive education campaign in the area one week prior to the military operations to encourage FDLR militia to disarm and be repatriated voluntarily to Rwanda.

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